

PAPER CHURCH

Where Faith and Life Intersect: Hospitality and Welcome *Sunday 24 May 2020*

Some Tips

Our hope is that this is a resource that will help us all to engage meaningfully with God's word for us and invite an open and experimental sense of worship today. Use it in a way that feels comfortable and helpful to you. Here are a couple of suggestions that might help the process.

Get prepared for worship

Have your Bible close by, perhaps set up some favourite music to listen to, find some food and drink to have during communion. It doesn't have to be bread and grape juice; it could be whatever is available (tea and a biscuit) to use in this symbolic time.

Get into a 'sacred' space

When we are not physically in a dedicated worship space (like a church building), it is important to mentally and spiritually shift into a sense of worship.

Be intentional. Sit somewhere where you feel receptive and responsive to God (e.g. a cosy chair or outside in the garden). Have some visual representation of God (perhaps a small cross, your Bible, a symbol or image). Start with a few moments of silence and deep breathing.

Consider your environment

Consider your environment and what will work for you. If you have others in your house (house-mates/family), consider sharing this time with them, each reading or participating as appropriate. You might simply reflect individually, in your own time and space. Afterwards, you might connect with others through technology to share your reflections, or an encouragement, with them.

Sung Worship

If you've been missing worshipping through singing your favourite songs with others over the last couple of months, please join Brendan from 10am Sunday on [Facebook Live](#) (with or without a Facebook account) for a time of live sung worship. He'll be taking requests! We'll finish up just in time for communion at 11am.

(Type 'facebook.com/ringwoodchurchofchrist' into your web browser at 10am to watch, or click on the Facebook Live link above.)

Message

Penny Martin

We are privileged today to be hearing from Stephen Barrington CEO of Foothills Community Care, around the intersection of faith and life – in the space of hospitality and welcome.

Established in 2002, Foothills provides places where people can connect and engage as they address issues such as family and domestic violence, addictions, homelessness, poverty, mental health issues, and social isolation. Many people who connect come from challenging backgrounds, and Foothills invites people to a place offering dignity and hope without judgment, where people can feel safe, valued and loved.

Connection often begins by the provision of a hearty, nutritious, home-cooked meal to all who walk in. However, it is much more than just a meal, it is a welcome into a positive and inclusive community for people who may not connect anywhere else. For many it is a hand up, not a handout.

Hi, I'm Stephen Barrington CEO of Foothills Community Care and this is Alice Garrick also from Foothills community care heading up the community casseroles area.

Community Casseroles: (Alice Garrick)

I wanted to talk a little bit about what is happening with community casseroles over the last two months and how we have upscaled just a little bit and all the amazing things that we have done with our community partners for Mother's Day.

Community casseroles started about five years ago growing out of the idea that within our community we can support each other in a way where nobody is just the helper and nobody is just there helpee, but that we are all in this together and there is a freezer full of meals for anybody who needs them and we can all take turns in being the one who needs them because that's how life is.

So, we grew from small beginnings and up until a few weeks ago we thought we were doing a pretty good job doing a monthly cook up which was about 150 to 200 meals going out each month. We are now doing somewhere around 300 to 400 meals every week so it's massively increased which has been an interesting learning curve. To suddenly figure out how to get all the new volunteers working in different ways and broaden our area that we deliver to and welcome people

to come and pick up from - this has been a big learning curve. It's also been important to see the different ways people are engaging with us.

We also put together a care pack of things like milk and juice and pasta, non-perishable items all the usual staples that you would want in your pantry and then we give out another bag that is full of about 3 - 4 dinners for the whole family so they go out every week and we are finding that the community is coming forward in all sorts of interesting ways to help. There are chefs who are out of work right now because their restaurants are closed so they are able to cook for us and become part of what we're doing. There are catering companies that are donating meals and ingredients and we find that the community is really coming together with so many people wanting to be a part of it delivering meals.

There are also so many people who might not have ever been in a position before where they are vulnerable and haven't necessarily had to reach out to the community before. There are people with two incomes, professional, no kids and suddenly they find they have no supports to lean on. We have families who don't have visas and so don't get any government support and may have other things going on for them who haven't ever had to ask for help before. The feedback that we're getting is that people are finding that connecting in with the community gives them a sense of support, a sense of connection, a sense of dignity and a sense of being part of something - which is exactly what we were hoping.

We have been able to scale up to support the community and we have been able to have volunteers come in in all sorts of different ways. People are crying every second week because of how moving it is to turn up at someone's doorstep and offer a home-cooked meal and the way that people in the community, the business community, restaurants and everybody have come together it's really, really powerful.

Mother's Day 2020: (Stephen Barrington & Alice Garrick)

A couple of weeks ago we had people approach us who we didn't know who said they had contact with a whole lot of chefs who are out of work at the moment or who have very little on. Particularly coming up to Mother's Day all these chefs would normally be absolutely flat out. All their restaurants are always wanting to be able to give something back to the community but were never in a place to be able to, but this year they found themselves in a place where they wanted to do something. I didn't know how to do that or who to connect with so we found each other, we had a conversation and from that very initial conversation (where we had never met before) to just 18 days later, we delivered 600 meals that were all delivered on Mother's Day Eve, freshly cooked amazing meals that went to people all around our community.

These chefs are top chefs, they are executive chefs in really high-class restaurants that if you were to go and sit down you would be paying \$100 for a meal. They all got together in this amazing kitchen down in Albert Park, making these meals for the community. One of the chefs, Dylan Kent, was top chef of the year last year and they produced this amazing feast. They delivered it all out here in a refrigerated truck and we had about 100 volunteers in the lead up and on the day to deliver these meals.

We had people picking up, we had social distancing, we had a *lot* of hand sanitiser and it was so amazing that it all came together so quickly and to have so many different moving parts involved.

By the end of the day to be standing here with Steve saying “we did it and it seemed impossible” some people realised and felt that they'd never had that kind of support before. There were mother's that were on their own because families couldn't visit them. There were people who might have breast cancer and were going through it alone. There were other people separated from their families in so many different ways. We've had so much feedback coming in saying that this was one of the best Mother's Days ever and that they felt so supported by community and that they felt so seen. It was wild but it came together and it was wonderful.

As well as the amazing gourmet meals, we had roast beef - Wagyu Beef from the MasterChef kitchen, about 80 to 90 kilos of that - so just an incredible supply of stuff that we had. We were also able to give people care packs with great toiletries, chocolates and other goodies so it was a real pampering time. It wasn't just about giving food out, but actually reminding people that they are loved and connected and they are not battling through this on their own, and I guess through this whole process for us it's about helping people to feel that they're not forgotten. People might feel that they are isolated more at this time but there are people out there who want to care for them and want to connect with them and support them as well.

I think it's important to acknowledge and honour that sense of connection we feel through sharing a meal, through shared food. There was one family whose grandparents were separated from the family because of social distancing and the grandfather has a terminal illness so they weren't sure if this was going to be the last Mother's Day they might ever be able to share together - but they couldn't see each other. They all ordered meals but to different locations, so that they could sit on Zoom and have the same meal and the power of that shared meal. It transcended distance and time and all those things and was really powerful.

Hospitality & Welcome: (Stephen Barrington)

Foothills community care exists to support people in a local community and we try and do that by providing safe places where people can come together and eat. To provide communities of love and acceptance, particularly overcoming fear and anxieties. Over I guess the last couple of months here when we started these restrictions we asked “what are we about?” We are about sharing the love of Jesus in really practical ways in our local community. We looked at examples of Jesus particularly, healing lepers, and the thing that really struck us was that he did it out of compassion. The word compassion came up over and over again and we thought that's actually what we're about. As we moved into this period of uncertainty we wanted to be marked as treating people with compassion and love, especially as people face fear and isolation we want to just be people who share Jesus' love in so many different ways. So that's been one of the things that has driven us.

Normally in this place on a Monday night we would have a dining room with 80 to 100 people come along and sit down and it would be about connection and about people sharing a meal together. It would be about people coming alongside the last, the least and the lost - people who don't feel like they're connected - and offering them a place to come and sit at table and to share a meal, and just to listen to their stories and to treat people with a sense of dignity and respect. I often think that a lot of the stuff that most of us take for granted e.g. sitting down and having a meal in a safe environment, in a warm environment in winter, with someone else and having someone to listen – it's the sort of stuff that a lot of people who normally come here for one of our meals don't get that opportunity and so having that place is really important.

With restrictions we obviously can't have our dining room now, so we're offering takeaway meals. We still want to give people a sense of freedom and choice which is really, really important, and so we get people to come in, a couple at a time, to pick some fresh fruit and vegetables some non-perishables - to actually support them in their life together.

We've been really blessed. We were down a few volunteers early on in COVID-19, particularly some older volunteers but we've just been so overwhelmed by people in the life of the community who want to be able to give back. We had 10 people straight away who said they wanted to deliver meals for us who have now joined the casseroles program that we spoke about earlier. So, we now have people coming out of the woodwork.

When we had our Mother's Day campaign a couple of weeks ago we had so many people wanting to volunteer with us so we just wrote to them and we filled up our volunteers just like that. To be able to provide that opportunity for people to volunteer in the life of our community, it's such an important thing. People really want to feel like they can make a difference in the life of their community and want to have some way of doing it.

Normally in a year we have about 200 people volunteer with us and it's a really significant way of people contributing back. This year it will probably be 300 to 400. Throughout the life of our local community, normally we would do about 200 meals a week through our community meals on Monday and Wednesday nights and then our delivered meals, and currently we are doing 500 to 600 meals a week. So, it's just gone over the top. Two weeks ago when we had our Mother's Day meals and other meals we did 1200 meals that week that we were able to distribute.

When I think about it it's quite daunting because we have done that overnight, but because we've got such a great community around us we've got people who want to join in and get involved and we've got a great bunch of supporters and partners who provide support for us. SecondBite and other rescue food services support us and so we get rescued food, rescued fruit and vegetables that we're able to use and turn into nutritious meals. We've been able to get a lot more access to produce over the last few months partly because the government has put a bit more money in and partly because there are less charities around doing this at the moment because a lot of them have had to shut down. So, we are actually able to give people some really good fresh food parcels and non-perishable parcels.

So, at the heart of what we do it's actually about providing hospitality, a place of belonging and acceptance and it's about modelling ourselves on Jesus. When we look at the gospels and read the stories of Jesus meeting with people a lot of it centred around food and around who was accepted at the table and who he brought into the table who might not have been accepted in the mainstream community of the time.

I love the verse:

So welcome each other, in the same way that Christ also welcomed you, for God's glory.

Romans 15:7

How do we welcome people the way Jesus welcomes us? There are so many stories in the gospels about Jesus accepting people through meals and through hospitality. We just had the Easter story not very long ago and of course the road to Emmaus is a core part of it. I love this story about Jesus walking along the road with two of his disciples who don't recognise him. It's only as they sit down and break bread together that they actually recognise who Jesus was. In the breaking of bread, in the sharing of a meal together something magical happens something mystical happens that we can't explain. It's more than just the physical food, it's actually about the shared life together that is so important for us today.

For us, hospitality is actually about sharing what we've got with those that don't normally get a seat at the table and there's lots of Gospel imperatives for that. For example, the story in Matthew 25 "The Sheep and the Goats", Jesus is saying when you serve the least of these you're actually serving me. So it's not about something that we do in order to make ourselves feel good, it's actually an incredibly spiritual activity when we share hospitality with the last, the least and the lost - the most vulnerable and isolated - we are actually serving Jesus.

Now what does that mean at this time of restrictions and COVID-19? I believe we have this incredible invitation to act creatively in the life of our local community and that will look different from my family to your family. We've just had restrictions ease a little and for some people that's about "Great - business as normal! Business is back on again!" but it's not actually like that. There's been some restriction easing in terms of the amount of people that can gather together, but from what we can gather we won't be able to open up our dining room until at least mid-July from what our Premier has said this week. This has implications for us about how we continue to serve - about Monday and Wednesday night meals and how we continue to offer hospitality. Especially as we move into winter, and as we support really vulnerable people - I'm thinking particularly of people who are sleeping rough and doing life really, really tough, and especially as the weather gets bad - what does it mean for us to be serving these: the last, the least and the lost right now?

One of my favourite passages is Mark chapter two when Jesus Calls Levi. Levi of course is a tax collector and he's going about his everyday business collecting taxes - probably the most unspiritual activity you could get in the world. Of course, that's also overlaid with first century Palestinian ideas about collecting taxes as a Jewish person on behalf of the Romans, on behalf of the empire. So here was a man who had incredible wealth and power but not too many mates at all. I often think why does Jesus come along and say to him "come and follow me", surely if I was Jesus I would be thinking about who would be my best team of people and frankly he wouldn't rate a mention. I guess that constantly amazes me that God's ways are not the ways that we think about doing things. We talk about the 'Upside down Kingdom' and that is present right the way through scripture - God's ways of doing things are really, really different to ours.

We often invite people around to our place because they will invite us back to theirs. We have coffee with friends. That's all really good but what does it mean to be looking out for the last, the least and the lost in our community? I love this story where Jesus comes along and asks Levi to follow him and Matthew says later that Jesus and his disciples were having dinner at Levi's house and many tax collectors and other sinners were there because they had become followers of Jesus and were also guests at the dinner. What happens? Of course, Jesus and the Pharisees have a big conflict over it. Pharisees don't like what Jesus is doing. Jesus isn't doing the right thing - he's not being respectful and not being like a good Pharisee or being a good religious teacher. He's hanging

out with the wrong crowd and so of course they do what all people do in power. Instead of going straight to Jesus, they go to his disciples and say what is Jesus doing?

Jesus says 'this is what I've come for, this is my work' and this is *our* work today. What does it mean to be caring for the last, the least and the lost - the most vulnerable and isolated in the life of our community? For Jesus it was not worrying about his reputation but it was actually about hanging out, befriending, sitting down and spending time with the most vulnerable.

How do we do that today? I love that for Jesus it's actually about sharing food and sharing life with people. We can't do it exactly the same at the moment. We would love to but there are many creative ways to do it both individually and as community.

God Bless, Stephen and Alice

A Prayer For The Least of These

January 23, 2014

From: <https://adailyprayer.wordpress.com/2014/01/23/a-prayer-for-the-least-of-these/>

Father, there is much that we don't understand on this side; why some go through life seemingly with ease and little trouble and others seem to be born with trouble that never goes away.

It is not for us to understand Your ways for You are a God of mystery with greater purpose than we can comprehend, and yet You have made clear to us through Scripture that which we are to understand.

Some of the very trouble we seek to avoid is what brings us to faith and causes us to live a life that is honouring to You and purposeful to others.

Keep our hearts sensitive and compassionate toward those who are undervalued by the world's standards.

When we put ourselves in their place, we identify with their struggles and feel the deep hurt they experience when looked down upon and rejected by others.

May we be Your tender arm of compassion,

Your gentle voice of acceptance and unconditional love.

In the name of Jesus we pray.

Amen.

Communion

Have some food and drink prepared for this time

If you're able, join us at 11am Sunday through Zoom to share in communion together at rngwd.com/communion or after you have shared in communion below, consider who you can call to have a chat as you would on a Sunday morning after a church service.

One of the things that we can be actively doing to embrace the idea of spiritual formation is to press into spiritual practices. Communion is a dedicated practice that we do week to week – to set aside time to pause and remember Jesus' death on a cross and the loving sacrifice that he made for each of us. As we pause for a few minutes and take simple food and drink – we remember Jesus meeting with his followers:

*Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it saying,
"Take, eat, this is my body".*

*Then he took the cup gave thanks and offered it to them,
and they all drank from it.*

Please share in your version of communion.

Communion is usually a time of being *in* community, breaking bread together as a symbolic remembering of Jesus' last supper with his disciples and followers. If we are not in our normal community it might feel strange to do this alone, as a couple or with only a small group of people.

Intentionally consider who you are communing with:

- Think of the people in close proximity to you e.g. neighbours. Give thanks for them.
- Consider and visually bring to mind friends in our church community who would normally be sitting close by at this time. Give thanks for them.
- Consider the community of the Trinity – God the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit – a divine community into which you are embraced today as a beloved child of God.

Connect with us

We really would like to know what you're thinking and how you're feeling, as well as how you have used this worship resource and whether you would like some changes. To do that you can fill in an online form by clicking this link rngwd.com/connect or entering the words into your web browser and completing the short form. You can always email the office too at office@ringwoodchurch.org.au or call 9870 8169.

If you would to donate and support the work of Foothills Community Care or to find out more please visit: www.foothills.org.au